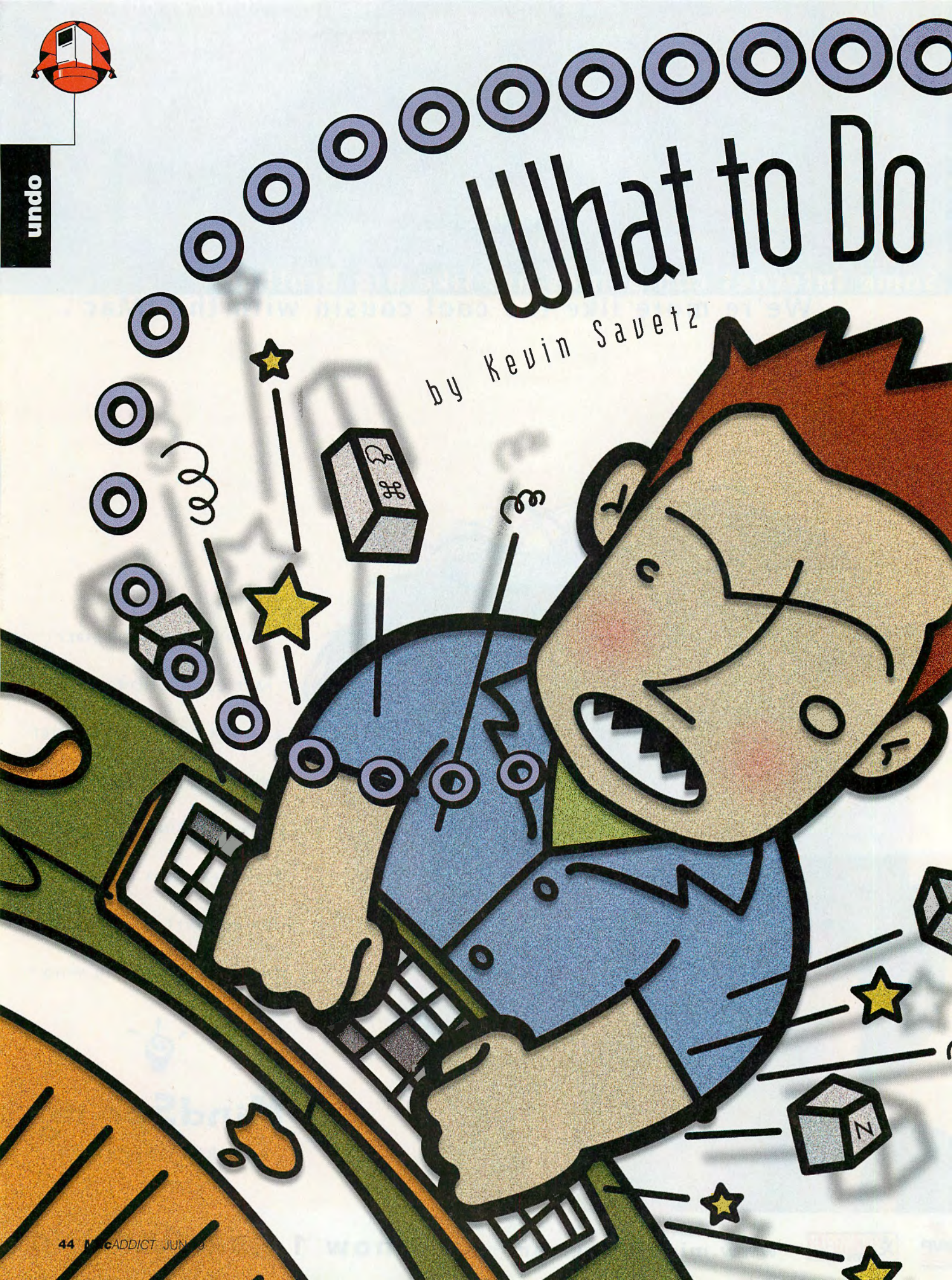
What to Do

by Kevin Savetz



Oooooh #%@*!!! When Undo Just Won't Do

Sometimes we Mac users get a little too sure of ourselves. Overloaded with false confidence, we then take wild and crazy shortcuts, secure in the knowledge that should we screw up, help is only a keystroke away. The allure of Undo is strong—after all, it's in almost every application, waiting to catch us after any misstep. There is no human error, large or small, that can't be fixed by pressing Command-Z or reaching for the ever-present Edit menu and choosing Undo.

Or is there?

The truth is, Undo works wonders, but there are some things it just can't fix—little problems, such as launching the wrong program, and big ones, like when your PowerBook walks away in a crowded airport. Just about all mistakes are undoable, but some are more undoable than others.

Do you know what to do when Undo just won't do? Take matters into your own hands. Read on for a laundry list of problems that Command-Z can't fix, along with their solutions. We'll also arm you with enough hints and tricks to get you out of just about any jam—or help you stay out of it in the first place.

Emergency Kit
We've got the software solutions to your problems. Check out the following shareware and product demos on The Disc. If these don't work, take two aspirin—you'll probably need them.
• Disinfectant 3.7.1
• Disk First Aid 8.2
• Flashback 1.1 trial
• Software and Hardware Tracker 3.1.4
• YankPro 3.1.1
• Helpless 1.1.2
• Conflict Catcher 8.0.3 demo
• NoDeskTopCleanUp 1.5
• URL Manager Pro 2.5.1

ILLUSTRATION BY ADAM VANDERHOOF

What to Do When Undo Just Won't Do

OH #%@*!!!!

I was straightening up my System Folder and threw out all the wrong extensions. Now I can't get Myth to run!

So you went on a cleaning frenzy and purged your System Folder of all sorts of files you didn't need—or so you thought? Start the healing process by reinstalling any programs that you may have crippled with your cleaning. Everything from system software to your favorite game can hinge on correct placement of extensions. In fact, a missing extension can prevent your Mac from starting up at all. If this is the case, try booting while holding down the Shift key to disable all extensions and control panels. If that fails, you should be able to boot from the emergency CD or floppy that came with your Mac.

The next time you get that urge to purge your hard drive, visit Extension Overload (http://www.mir.com.my/~cmteng) first. This useful resource explains the true purpose of hundreds of extensions and control panels, providing you with the info you need to make informed decisions about which add-ons are necessary and which are truly trashable. Then, just to be safe, tuck extensions you want to trash into a disabled folder for a few days to make sure the coast is clear before you haul them to the curb.

Alternatively, you can use Aladdin Systems' Spring Cleaning 3.0 to help you safely clean your System Folder. (See the next quick fix for more information on this program.)

OH #%@*!!!!

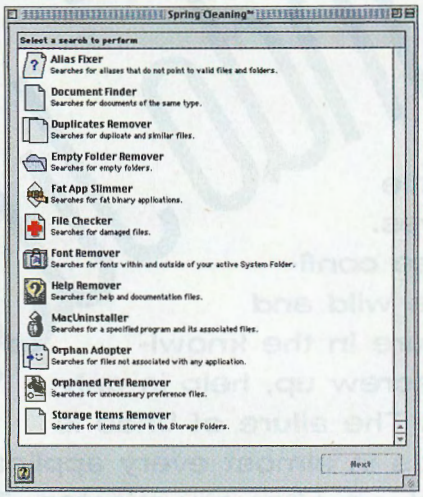
I just installed a new program, but the more I use it, the more I hate it.

So that combination Web browser, spreadsheet, and screen saver you downloaded sounded like a good idea but wasn't? Follow these steps to get rid of it.

1. First, run the installer again. Check to see if it has an uninstall option. If so, choose it and wash that bad software away.

2. If not, check to see if the installer left an installer log file behind (usually in the application's primary folder or littering your hard disk). The log file contains a detailed list of what was installed—and where. Remove those components by dragging them to the Trash.

3. Without a log file, you're working without a map. You can start by throwing out the program's primary folder, but who knows what else its installer may have hidden on your system? An alternative to scouring your system for left-behind software bits is to use Aladdin Systems' Spring Cleaning 3.0 ($49.95, 800-850-3388, http://www.aladdinsys.com). This handy program can uninstall any application and completely remove its associated files. You can also try Yank, a $15 shareware tool that can uninstall software and clean up your bulging Preferences folder.


Spring Cleaning™
Select a search to perform
Alias Fixer
Searches for aliases that do not point to valid files and folders.
Document Finder
Searches for documents of the same type.
Duplicates Remover
Searches for duplicate and similar files.
Empty Folder Remover
Searches for empty folders.
Fat App Slimmer
Searches for fat binary applications.
File Checker
Searches for damaged files.
Font Remover
Searches for fonts within and outside of your active System Folder.
Help Remover
Searches for help and documentation files.
MacUninstaller
Searches for a specified program and its associated files.
Orphan Adopter
Searches for files not associated with any application.
Orphaned Pref Remover
Searches for unnecessary preference files.
Storage Items Remover
Searches for items stored in the Storage Folders.
Next

SPRING CLEANING UNINSTALLS UNWANTED APPS and keeps your hard drive free of debris.

OH #%@*!!!!

I just emailed that rant about my boss...to my boss.

Start working on your resume. With Internet email, once you click Send your mail is as good as delivered—with no getting it back. But though the odds are against you, there's a tiny chance you can save your job if you and your boss both use America Online. From your mailbox window, click the Sent Mail tab. Now highlight the errant message and click Unsend. If the boss hasn't read it already, your mail will be quietly removed from his or her in-box. If your boss has read it, you will be quietly removed from your cube.

OH #%@*!!!!

I meant to save that email, not delete it!

This goof may not leave you in dire straits. The good news is that most email clients keep deleted mail in a trash folder, at least until you quit the program. If you use Eudora, choose Trash from the Mailbox menu to reach that misfiled mail. Select the message and use the Transfer menu to move it back to your in-box (or to any other folder). If you use Microsoft Outlook Express, take a peek in its Deleted Messages folder where your email is hiding, then drag it back to the appropriate folder.

(By the way, America Online is once again the exception to the rule. When you click the Delete button in the AOL mail folder, that message is gone for good.)

OH #%@*!!!!

I was going to write down my Internet connection settings tomorrow (I swear), but I'm having problems getting online today.

Sorry, there's no magic bullet for this one. Pick up the phone and call your Internet service provider. Get the right information, including your IP address and subnet mask, router address, DNS server, and mail server, and for goodness' sake write it all down. Then tape the settings notes to your modem—unless it's an internal one, in which case you might just want to post your POP settings in one exciting diary entry.

OH #%@*!!!!

I launched the wrong program. How do I stop it?

Press and hold Control-period while the application is loading, and it will stop in its tracks. Maybe. If not, press Command-Q and get on with your life. If you don't have a life, then go read the *Letters* section.

OH #%@*!!!!

I hit the Help key instead of Delete. Man, I hate it when I do that!

Who put the Help key so close to the Delete key? It doesn't matter: This fat-fingered blunder is an easy one to prevent. Download Helpless, a $10 shareware add-on that disables that pesky Help key. (When you really do need help, you can still find it in the menu bar.) Helpless is available at http://sodium.ch.man.ac.uk/pages/redpoint.html.

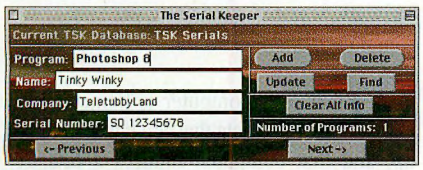
OH #%@*!!!!

I reinstalled a program but lost its registration code.

First, check the floppy disk or CD-ROM you used to install the software. Is the registration code printed there? How about in the manual? No? Then it's time for tech support. Just call up the company and ask for your code. Because you sent in the program's registration card (you did send it in, right?), you should be in the company's database.

In the future, keep a file with your software

serial numbers and shareware registration codes. Software & Hardware Tracker is a collection of FileMaker Pro databases that helps you store and organize registration codes, serial numbers, and other notes about your computer products. It costs only $25, but you'll need FileMaker to use it. If you don't own a copy of FileMaker, try Steven Byrd's The Serial Keeper, a simple stand-alone database for tracking serial numbers. It's free.



IF YOU KEEP LOSING TRACK of your software serial numbers, The Serial Keeper's simple database could be your salvation.

OH #%@*!!!!

I caught a virus from someone. (I won't mention any names because the person I caught it from is really, really nice and didn't do it on purpose.)

Do you use protection? If it's your Mac that's caught the virus, you need to use an antivirus program to expunge the infection as soon as possible. The longer you wait, the greater the chance it will corrupt your precious files. If you already have a commercial program such as Norton AntiVirus ($69.95, Symantec, 541-334-6054, http://www.symantec.com), make sure it has up-to-date virus definitions, then use it. To get the latest definitions, visit the virus software maker's Web site or phone its customer service department.

If you don't have an antivirus application, you need to get one. Bad news for us cheapskates: You'll have to pony up the cash for a truly trustworthy antivirus tool. There are no free or shareware programs capable of scanning for all Mac viruses. The best free option, Disinfectant 3.7.1, is no longer being updated to catch new viruses. If you can't or won't pay for a commercial program, using Disinfectant is better than nothing. But if your computer is harboring a recent strain, Disinfectant may be powerless to help.

Remember that antivirus software won't work unless you use it. Running a thorough scan once a month should be enough to keep most computers clean. However, you'll want to run it more often if you download lots of files from the Internet or frequently swap software or documents with associates.

Even if you use virus protection, back up your data regularly. And don't keep just one backup—rotate among several sets of backups. That way, even if your computer does get infected, you can be sure you've got at least one safe copy of your data.

OH #%@*!!!!

I lost the manual to my iMac, and now I need it to figure out how to install RAM.

First of all, installing RAM in an iMac is better left to pros—it's not exactly easy to do. Your best bet is to order extra RAM right off the bat and have it installed in the store before you take your iMac home. If, however, the cuddly creature is already snug on your desk and you're in the mood for a zany adventure, you can refer back to *MacAddict*'s "iMac Inside" (Nov/98, p46) for a detailed how-to. And if you threw out that issue (for shame!), you can look for the manual online. Most companies' Web sites offer downloadable documentation in Adobe Acrobat format. Apple, for instance, has a Web manual archive for just about all of its hardware and software; just visit the Apple Product Documentation Archive (http://support.info.apple.com/manuals/manuals.qry).

If you lose a product manual and can't find it online, call the manufacturer's customer service and explain your problem; the company may be able to replace your manuals for a nominal charge. Or check out the awesome selection of computer books from PeachPit Press (http://www.peachpit.com) for more detailed—and more entertaining—information.

OH #%@*!!!!

I threw out an important file, then emptied the Trash.

When it comes to Mac files, Symantec's Norton Utilities ($99.95, 541-334-6054, http://www.symantec.com) is your personal trash scavenger. Its UnErase tool slogs through the remains of discarded files on your hard drive and does its best to recover the ones you accidentally trashed (see "Dumpster Diving" at right). There's no guarantee that your deleted files will still be around, but you can increase their chances of survival by not saving anything to the drive until you use Norton.

OH #%@*!!!!

I switched Web browsers and lost all my bookmarks!

Switching to a different browser shouldn't mean losing all your bookmarks. Here's what to do if you're moving from Netscape Navigator to Microsoft Internet Explorer.

1. In Navigator, select Edit Bookmarks from the Bookmarks menu. Then choose Save from the File menu to save your bookmarks to your hard drive as an HTML document. Name the file "moving.html."

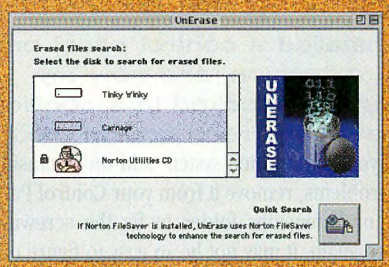
2. Open Internet Explorer. Select Open Favorites from the Favorites menu. Then choose Import from the File menu and select moving.html. Voilà!

If you're switching from Internet Explorer to Navigator, do the following.

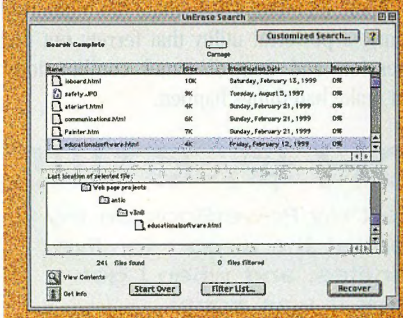
1. Select Open Favorites from Internet Explorer's Favorites menu. Choose Export from the File menu to save your favorites (again, name it "moving.html)."

Dumpster Diving

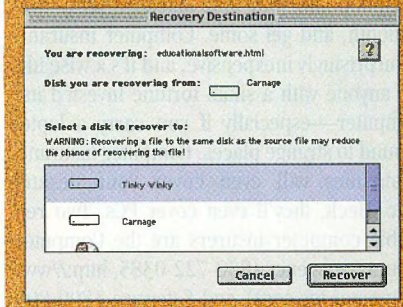
Trashed your Trash and now you want it back? Roll up your sleeves and start digging....


UnErase
Erased files search:
Select the disk to search for erased files.
Tinky Winky
Carnage
Norton Utilities CD
UNERASE
Quick Search
If Norton FileSaver is installed, UnErase uses Norton FileSaver technology to enhance the search for erased files.

1 To salvage a deleted file with Norton Utilities' UnErase function, first choose the disk where you had the unlucky file stored.



2 Next, select the file from the list of deleted items. Some items may not be recoverable. If you're not sure a file is the one you need, use the View Contents and Get Info buttons to glean more information.


Recovery Destination
You are recovering: educationalsoftware.html
Disk you are recovering from: Carnage
Select a disk to recover to:
WARNING: Recovering a file to the same disk as the source file may reduce the chance of recovering the file!
Tinky Winky
Carnage
Cancel
Recover

3 Finally, choose a drive to store the recovered file. For best results, recover to a different place, such as a Zip disk or a floppy.

What to Do When Undo Just Won't Do

2. Switch to Navigator and select Edit Bookmarks from the Bookmarks menu. Choose Open Bookmarks File from the File menu to import the bookmarks.

If you want to share bookmarks between both browsers, or if you're simply looking for a better bookmarking tool, try URL Manager Pro, a $25 shareware utility. It's browser independent, and it does a better job of organizing bookmarks than either Navigator or Internet Explorer. Find URL Manager Pro at http://www.url-manager.com.

OH #%@*!!!!

I installed a control panel or an extension, and now my system is locked in a conflict that even Freud couldn't fix.

If you know which system add-on is causing problems, remove it from your Control Panels or Extensions folder to fix the screwup. Then again, it may not be so easy to figure out which add-ons don't play well together (there could be two or more). For such cases you need Casady & Greene's Conflict Catcher ($79.95, 831-484-9228, http://www.casadyg.com), a powerful utility that ferrets out the extension and control panel combinations that make bad things happen.

OH #%@*!!!!

I left my PowerBook on my seat at the airport for five minutes, and when I got back it was gone!

This is the mother of all undoables. First file a report with the police. Then contact your computer-insurance company to report the theft and get a check to replace your Mac.

What? You don't have computer insurance? Then hop into your time machine, jump back a month, and get some. Computer insurance is surprisingly inexpensive, and it's a wise idea for anyone with a small fortune invested in a computer—especially if you carry a laptop around to strange places. Computer-insurance companies will even cover your desktop Mac. Heck, they'll even cover PCs. Two reputable computer insurers are the Computer-Insurance Agency (800-722-0385, http://www.computer-ins.com) and Safeware (800-800-1492, http://www.safeware.net).

The cost to insure your computer depends on how much coverage you want and where you live. A California resident can insure up to $5,000 of equipment against most kinds of catastrophes (except earthquakes) for $69 a year through Safeware. At the Computer-Insurance Agency, a $5,000 policy that includes quake coverage costs $125 a year.

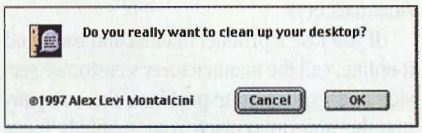
OH #%@*!!!!

I accidentally chose the Finder's Clean Up command and messed up my perfect desktop icon arrangement.

Step one: Put those misplaced icons back where they belong for the last time.

Step two: Install Alessandro Levi Montalcini's NoDeskTopCleanUp ($10, http://www.montalcini.com). This nifty shareware control panel lets you add a confirmation dialog box to any menu item. NoDeskTopCleanUp gives you a chance to opt out when you accidentally choose Clean Up. It also helps clumsy mousers avoid accidental shutdowns and restarts.

Step three: See an analyst about your unbecoming anality.



WITH THE NODESKTOPCLEANUP SHAREWARE installed, this little window stands between you and accidental reorganization of desktop icons.

OH #%@*!!!!

I threw out the disk that came with my scanner/printer/digital camera, and now I can't figure out how to make it work.

This is the reason they invented the Web. Every hardware manufacturer worth its salt has a Web site with downloadable drivers. Point your browser to the company's site, download the appropriate software, and you'll be printing, scanning, and downloading pictures from your camera in minutes.

OH #%@*!!!!

I need just one...more...Undo.

Programs with multiple levels of Undo are wonderful, but invariably you need just one more Undo than the program provides. That's no problem if you use Aladdin Systems' Flashback ($49.95, 800-850-3388, http://www.aladdinsys.com). This program lets you revert to any earlier version of a document: Every time you save, it creates a permanent record that won't get nuked when you save again. Not only can you revert to the last saved version of your file, you can jump back to the previous saved version, or even all the way back to your first draft.

OH #%@*!!!!

I was canoeing down the Yangtze River while putting the finishing touches on my latest travel guide, when the canoe tipped over and I lost everything!

When your computer is home to irreplaceable data that you haven't backed up, and that computer endures a catastrophe—such as a fire or flood—you may think your ship is sunk.

But don't give up. Your precious data may still be clinging for dear life to those hard disk platters, and a data-recovery service just might be able to retrieve it intact. Leaders in the field include DriveSavers (800-440-1904, http://www.drivesavers.com) and Datarec (800-563-1167, http://www.datarec.com). Such services are expensive—DriveSavers says its average invoice is $800, but prices can range from $200 to $2,000. Then again, that may be a small price to pay to rescue your invaluable data from a burnt, crushed, or soggy computer.

The folks at DriveSavers also say that "normal, everyday failures" account for the vast majority of the work they do. Mundane digital disasters like data corruption far outnumber dramatic ones like fires and floods. No matter what the eventual fate of your computer, a good backup strategy is all it takes to avoid data loss. Back up often, and keep your backups offsite. Although that sounds like a hassle, it doesn't have to be. Dantz's Retrospect Express ($49.95, 800-225-4880, http://www.retrospect.com) can back up files to removable media or to an Internet FTP site without much fuss.

OH #%@*!!!!

I installed a plug-in that I needed to access this really cool dancing-hamster site, and now my Web browser keeps crashing.

Removing a misbehaving browser plug-in is like removing a tick from a dog, except no one has to be tested for Lyme disease. Just open the plug-ins folder inside your browser's folder, find the offending add-on, pluck that bugger out, and toss it in the Trash. Finish the job by quitting and restarting your browser.

Kevin Savetz (savetz@northcoast.com) writes about Macs and is an avid collector of vintage computers.